

# Neighbours' songs are like our own

Rymdyuny's Belarusian-Lithuanian Centre of Culture, Education and Information known for its folk group far beyond Ostrovets District

By Yuri Chernyakevich

Exclamations of 'Labas ritas!' and 'Laba dien!' are heard not just in Lithuania but in the small village of Rymdyuny, in the Ostrovets District, Grodno Region. The language of neighbouring Lithuania is known to adults and young people alike, as the settlement has been home to a great many ethnic Lithuanians since ancient times.

When someone hears Lithuanian spoken they don't automatically assume that tourists are present, coming to admire the beauty of Belarus. Unsurprisingly, Rymdyuny has Belarus' only Belarusian-Lithuanian Centre of Culture, Education and Information. It features two schools (one using Lithuanian language and the other Belarusian language), a pupils' boarding school, a hostel for teachers, a cultural centre and

a library. Although construction was financed by Lithuania, maintenance and services at the Centre are the responsibility of the Belarusian treasury.

About 140 pupils attend, with the children able to enter either Belarusian or Lithuanian universities on leaving. In fact, most travel to Lithuania but a great many also return to Belarus at a future date, as diplomatic specialists.

The language of Čiurlionis is used for writing, dictation, discussion and, even, singing songs — helped by amateur folk group *Žilvitis* ('Willow'). The group began entertaining in the mid-1940s, after the Great Patriotic War, adapting customs and songs passed down from their grandmothers. Maria Mozheiko is one of the elders of the ensemble, celebrating her 90th birthday next year. In one of the Centre's



Maria Mazheiko (right) displaying rarities from her antique trunks

museum rooms, rich in exhibits, she shows me just how people once spun and combed flax, before weaving the thread on looms, singing folk songs as they worked.

In her unique accent, she tells us, "Belarusians understand our Lithuanian language and we understand Russian and Belarusian. Accordingly, we can sing in various languages: Belarusian, Polish, Russian and Lithuanian. The

most important thing is that we are always welcomed everywhere, because our songs are about love, separation and fun. They can be understood without knowing the language."

*Žilvitis* has performed in the Ostrovets District and beyond, regularly taking part in the Festival of National Cultures in Grodno. It's famous in Lithuania too — just 30km away. The grandmothers of Rymdyuny make trips

very often. The younger members of the group also perform traditional dances, joined by the seniors.

Relationships between Belarusians and Lithuanians in Rymdyuny are close, with many books in the local library brought from the neighbouring country and Lithuanian artists coming to perform at the Centre. The village is a true microcosm of diplomacy between our two nations.

## Geography of cultural contacts

**Belarus interested in cultural co-operation with Indonesia and Bangladesh**

The Minister of Culture of Belarus, Boris Svetlov, noted during an online-conference on BELTA's website, "In the near future, we'll sign agreements on cultural co-operation with Indonesia and Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, relations with Vietnam, China, Iran, the UAE, Serbia and Moldova are being developed."

Co-operation is also active with Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Kazakhstan and 46 intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements are current with 33 countries worldwide. Liai-

sons are active within the CIS, as well as with Baltic States, European and Near Eastern countries, and those in South East Asia and Latin America.

Of course, many foreign guests annually take part in international festivals held in Belarus while our artists attend similar forums and perform abroad.

## Revival of forgotten masters



In the open air in Alexandria

**18th international Image of the Motherland in Visual Art plein air opens in Alexandria agrotown**

The current forum consists of two parts. From early to mid-July, ten young Belarusian artists from the Mogilev, Gomel, Vitebsk and Brest regions, alongside those from the city of Minsk, worked in the Shklov District, depicting the beauty of local landscapes. The second

stage is being held in early September and will bring together professional artists from Belarus, Russia and elsewhere, gathering at the museum-estate of the prominent Russian painter Vasily Polenov, near Tula, before touring the most picturesque sites in the Mogilev Region.

In October, the plein air will be exhibited at the Pavel Maslennikov Regional Museum of Arts,

in Mogilev. Some pictures created will be bought by museums in the Dnieper River area, while the rest will be presented to the Maslennikov Museum of Arts (according to established tradition).

"One of the major goals of the plein air is to revive the forgotten names of our prominent fellow countrymen and painters," notes Anatoly Sinkovets, who heads the Chief Culture Department at the Mogilev Regional Executive Committee. "The present forum is dedicated to Robert Genin."

Robert Genin was a Belarus-born representative of the Paris painting school, born in 1884 in the village of Vysokoe, (Klimovichi District, Mogilev Province). He studied in Munich and Paris, painting communist clubs in France and creating monumental works, as well as ordinary canvases. Later, he moved to Moscow to teach fresco work and easel painting at the Proletarian Artel studios, in the Vladimir Region's Mstyora.



Shot from the film *Role*

## 30 year old journey to be shown on screen

By Eduard Pimenov

**The Role, shot jointly with Belarusfilm, vying for Moscow Film Festival awards**

The picture, shot by Belarusfilm Studio, Russia's Proline Media and Lenfilm, Finland's BUFO STUDIO and Germany's SIGMA H.V.e K., has been presented at the 35th Moscow International Film Festival. Its script was first written by Pavel Finn back in the early 1980s; however, the project was censored in 1982 by the Soviet regime, followed by 'commercial' censorship. Only at the beginning of the 21st century, after publication in Cinema Art magazine, was the script revived, by producer Andrey Sigle.

According to Konstantin Lopushansky, many scenes were shot in Belarus. "Almost the entire civil war was shot there. When you have a real rusty locomotive, it's so authentic; much better than relying on compu-

ter graphics, as is usual today. The sets were built with care," he explains.

The plot tells of talented provincial actor Nikolay Yevlakhov, who joins the White Guards and is seeking refuge from the Red Army. Near a railway station, the Reds manage to capture the train on which he is travelling and Commander Plotnikov lines up his prisoners, staring into each face, deciding who should live or die. He stops in front of Yevlakhov, realising that he is his physical double, but before he can decide what action to take, enemy cavalry breaks through the defence perimeter and Plotnikov rushes into battle, where he is killed.

Yevlakhov, portrayed by Russian actor Maxim Sukhanov, reaches Finland and begins to research Plotnikov, planning to 'resurrect' him by returning to Moscow with fake documents. He takes on his identity, as he had played acting roles previously. Finally, he is executed by firing squad.